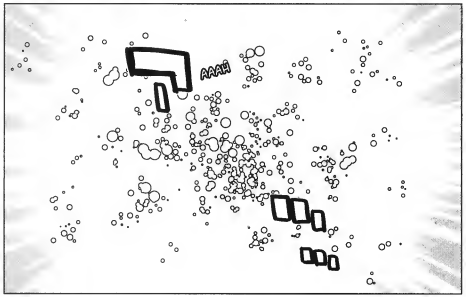
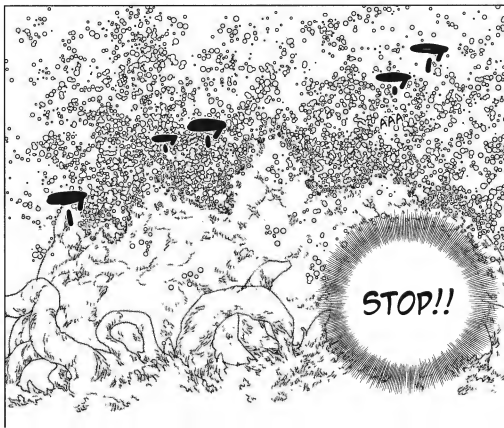
22. Acceptance

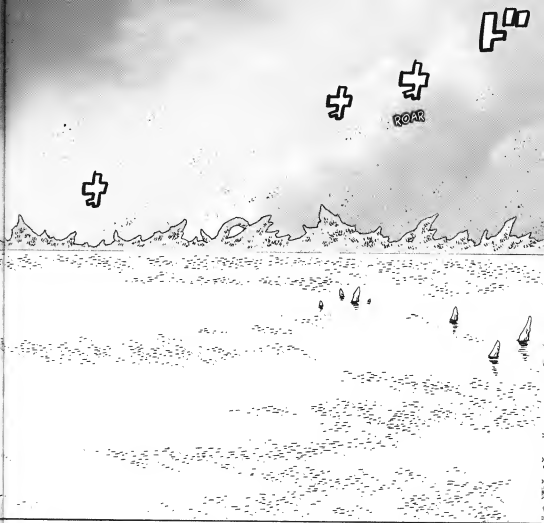
P-
PLEASE
STO—

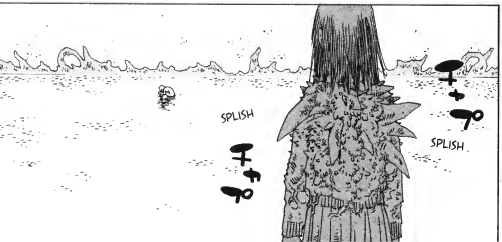

AAAH

BLAST

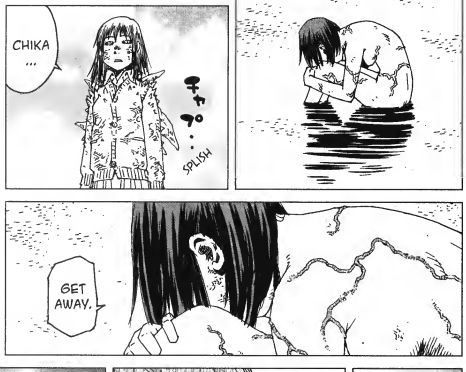

STOP!!

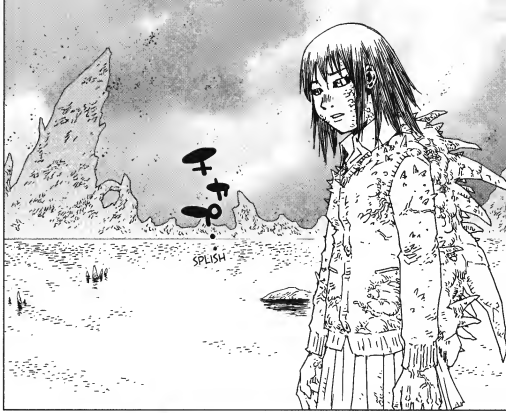
ZZHAA


ROAR


SPLISH
SPLISH

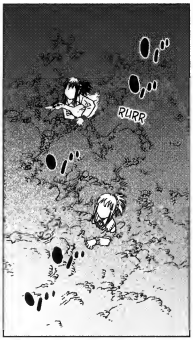
SPLISH


CHIKA
...
チャプ・
SPLISH
GET AWAY.
...
I SAID GET AWAY!!
CHIKA, I...


チャプ
SPLISH

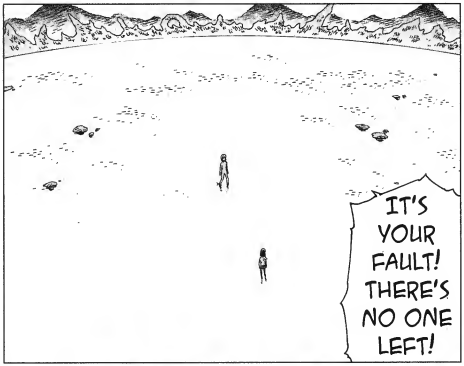
...

MUST HAVE EXISTED INSIDE OF THAT MASS.
THE WORLD AS CHIKA WANTED IT

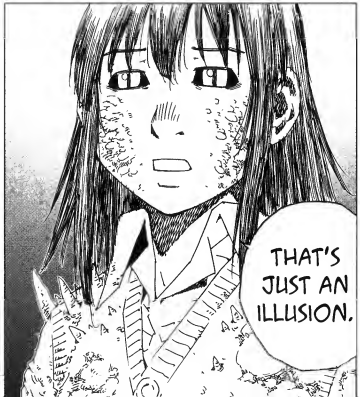

RURR

HUHH.
GAA!
THAT'S...
GAA!

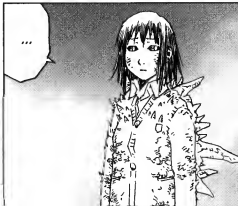
SPLOSH
IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT.
SPLISH


IT'S YOUR FAULT! THERE'S NO ONE LEFT!

...

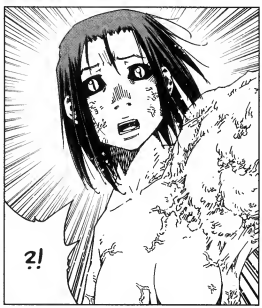

THAT'S JUST AN ILLUSION.

TELLING ME THAT WE'RE FRIENDS !!
THEY WERE ALL


...

SPLORT

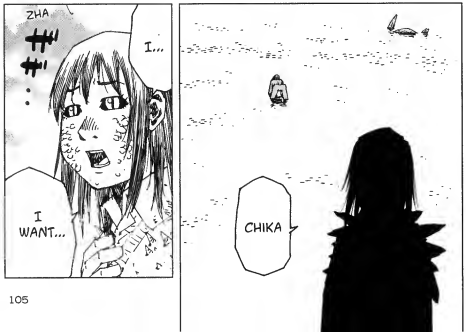
CHIKA...
CUT IT OUT.


?!

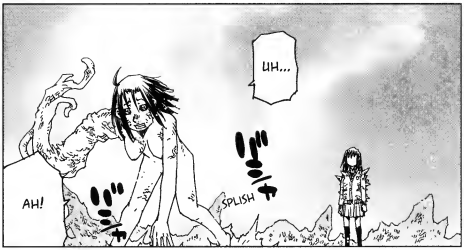
SH- SHUT UP!!
DON'T LOOK AT ME THAT WAY!!
SHOOOO

SHOO

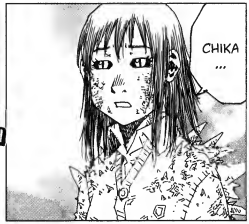
I DON'T WANT TO BE ALONE AGAIN!!
DRIP
DRIP
NO...


ZHA
I...
I WANT...
CHIKA

ZUK
UNH...
WHUM

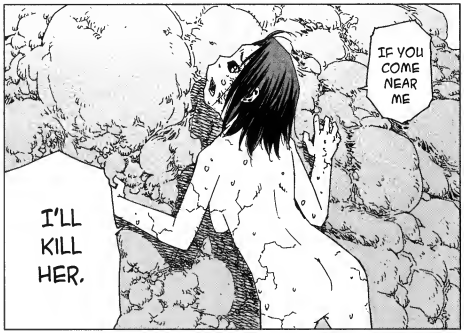

UH...
AH!
SPLISH

NO...
NO!
SPLISH

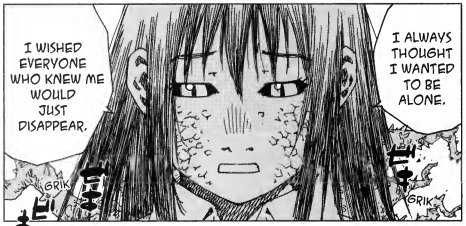

CHIKA
...

ZHAA
ZHAA

SAVA...


IF YOU COME NEAR ME
I'LL KILL HER.

ZHAA
ZHAA
ZHAA
ZHAA
ZHAA


I WISHED EVERYONE WHO KNEW ME WOULD JUST DISAPPEAR.
I ALWAYS THOUGHT I WANTED TO BE ALONE.
GRIK
GRIK

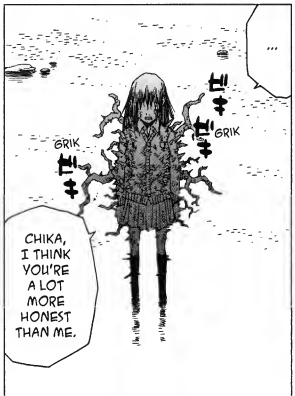
BUT I WAS WRONG.

CHIKA, I GET IT NOW.
SAYA SAID TO ME, "NO MATTER WHAT,
I'LL ALWAYS BECOME YOUR FRIEND." I WAS SO HAPPY. IT WAS A FIRST FOR ME.

IF I SEVER IT AT ITS BASE...
HIKARU, LET ME HANDLE THIS!

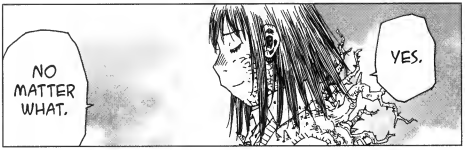
GRIK
GRIK
...!

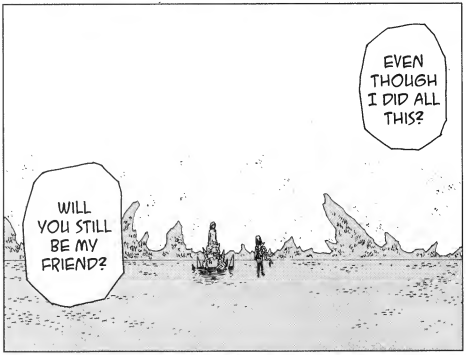
YOU COULD HURT SAYA.
WAIT!

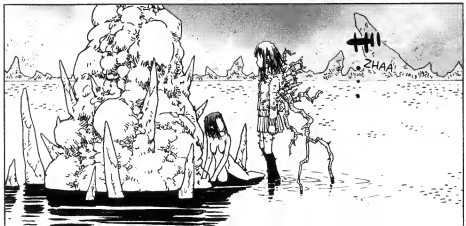

...
GRIK
GRIK
CHIKA, I THINK YOU'RE A LOT MORE HONEST THAN ME.

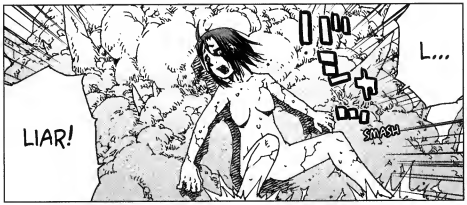
...
IT'S UP TO HIKARU NOW.

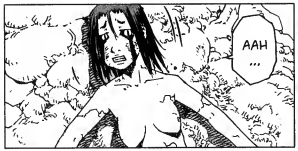
WILL YOU BE MY FRIEND?
I'VE BEEN WANTING TO ASK...

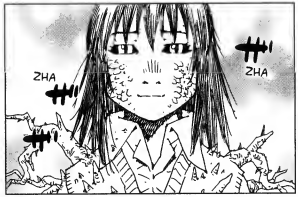

YES.
NO MATTER WHAT.


EVEN THOUGH I DID ALL THIS?
WILL YOU STILL BE MY FRIEND?


ZHAA


L...
LIAR!
SMASH


AAH ...

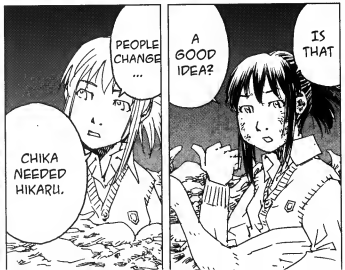

ZHA
ZHA

WILL YOU REALLY? NO MATTER WHAT?
...

ZHA
I'M NOT LYING.

SOB
SOB
WEEP

ZZZZZ


PEOPLE CHANGE ...
CHIKA NEEDED HIKARU.
A GOOD IDEA?
IS THAT

YES!
WE'LL ALWAYS BE FRIENDS!

SOB
SOB

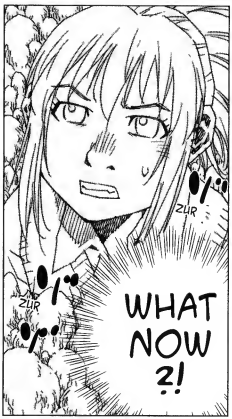
AAH!
URR
NGG
SPLASH
SPLUSH
DAMN IT!!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
ZZK
CRAP!
HIKARU'S ALREADY ABSORBED SO MUCH, CHIKA PUT HER OVER CAPACITY!
GRAK
GRAK

ZZK
WHAT NOW?!
ZLIK
H...
HI-KARU?!
BADUMP

N-
NO...
IF YOU... DO THAT...
KLAP
HIKARU WILL NO LONGER BE HUMAN !!
UHUHUHUH
URG!
I CAN'T CONTROL THE BODY!
I SEE. THEN DO AS YOU WISH.
...
WHOOO

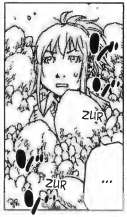
ACK !!
UHISH
WOULD YOU LIKE MY HELP?
ZZK
IF I CHANGE YOUR SIZE, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CONTAIN IT ALL.
YOU'VE EXCEEDED YOUR CAPACITY.
UHOOO

OHH!
GRIK
ARGH!
GRIK


ZUR
ZUR
WHAT NOW?!

WHAT SHALL WE DO?
ZUR
ZUR
HIKARU WON'T LAST LIKE THIS!

HEY !!


ZUR
ZUR
...

HEY! WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?!
ZUR
ZUR
ZUR
THE SUBSPECIES ARE ABOUT TO OVER-WHELM HER!

...
ZUR
ZUR
ONLY ONE CHOICE.

WE HAVE TO DRAW OUT ALL THE SUBSPECIES.

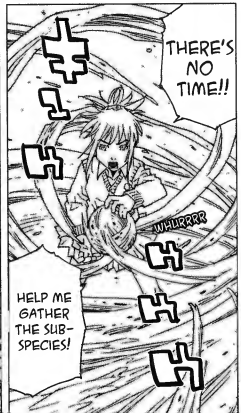
HIKARU!!
SPLASH
H...
SPLASH
DRAW OUT?
ZUR
ZUR
YOU MEAN WE HAVE TO LEAVE HER BODY, TOO?
YES!
ZUR
ZUR
ZUR
BUT I HAVE AN IDEA!!
BUT WE'RE SYMBI-ONTS!
I THOUGHT WE WERE IN A MUTUALLY DEPENDENT RELATION-SHIP?

Finale: Separation of Light
ZHA
ZHA
ZHA
AAAH!

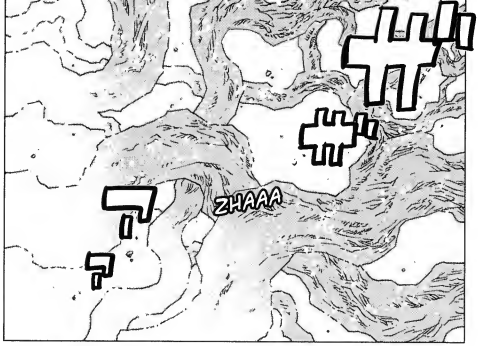
FLASH

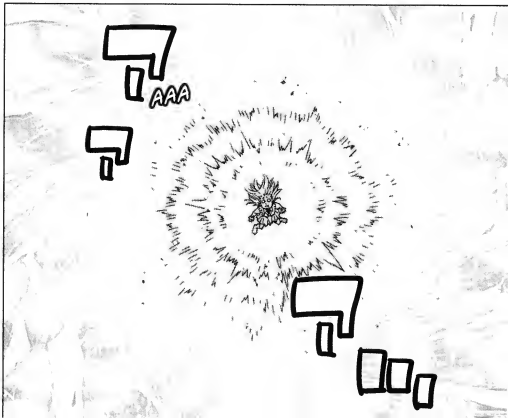
AAH!
ARGH!

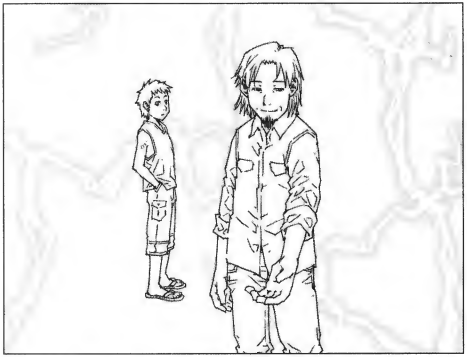
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO ?!
ZUR
ZUR
ZUR


THERE'S NO TIME!!
WHURRRR
HELP ME GATHER THE SUB-SPECIES!

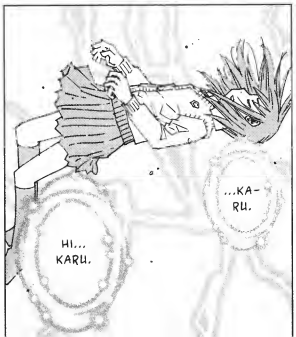
WHOR
WHOR
WHOR


ZHAAA


AAA

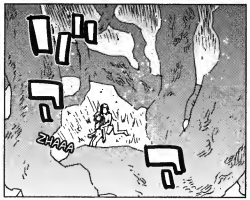


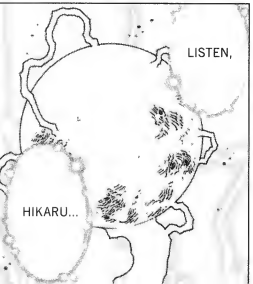
DAD?
MASA-YA?

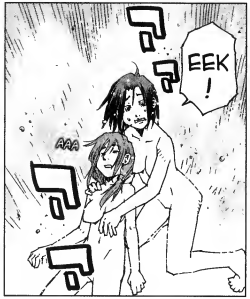

HI... KARU.
...KA-RU.

WHAT AM I...
WHERE AM I?

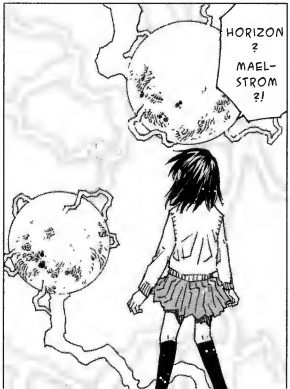
CHIKA! SAYA! THEY'RE BACK!
PHEW... THEY'RE OKAY!

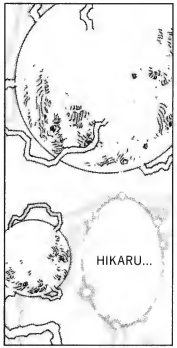

ZHAAA

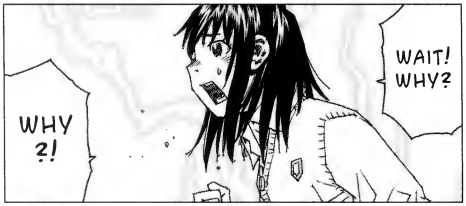

LISTEN,
HIKARU...

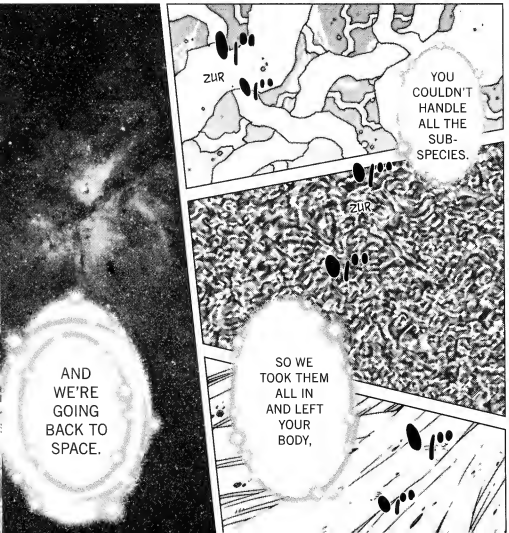

EEK!
AAA

!!


HORIZON ? MAEL-STROM ?!


HIKARU...


WAIT! WHY?
WHY ?!


ZUR
YOU COULDN'T HANDLE ALL THE SUB-SPECIES.
ZUR
SO WE TOOK THEM ALL IN AND LEFT YOUR BODY,
AND WE'RE GOING BACK TO SPACE.

MAELSTROM AND I ARE LEAVING THIS PLANET.

GOOD-BYE,
HIKARU.

I'M GRATE-FUL TO YOU.
DON'T BE SAD, HIKARU.
I THOUGHT OF OUR SYMBIOSIS AS MERELY NECESSARY.
WHEN WE MET

NO OTHER CHOICE.
TIME WAS LIMITED, AND WE HAD
THERE MUST BE SOMETHING ELSE WE CAN DO!
NO!!

THERE WAS NO OTHER WAY TO SAVE YOU.
IT'S TOO SOON!
DON'T LEAVE ME ALONE!

THANK YOU, HIKARU.

BUT AS YOU CHANGED, MAELSTROM AND I WERE AFFECTED: WE CHANGED, TOO.
IT WAS ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED. RIGHT, MAELSTROM?
TSK, I GUESS.
ERR DE ERR

I MET NONE OTHER THAN YOU, A ONE-IN-7 BILLION CHANCE ...
IT NEVER WOULD'VE HAPPENED OTHER-WISE.

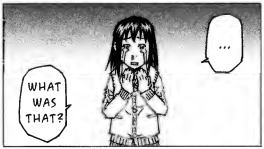
IT'LL COMMUNICATE WITH ITS HOST EVENTUALLY, LIKE US.
HIKARU! HIKARU!
BUT A SUB-SPECIES ...
DON'T WORRY.
OUR RE-SEARCH HAS FOUND
THAT THEY CAN GROW AND LEARN.

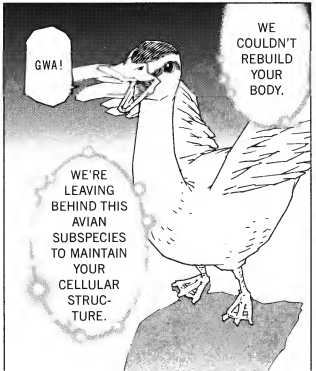
THE CHAOS ON THIS PLANET WILL SETTLE AS THE SUBSPECIES GROW AND EVOLVE.
MANY MORE MAY APPEAR, BUT THEY'LL BE SIGNS OF A NEW EVOLUTION YOU'VE OBTAINED—PROBABLY.

GWAK! GWAK!
HIKARU, DON'T CRY!

SNIFF
クンクン

SOB
SOB
SOB
WEEP

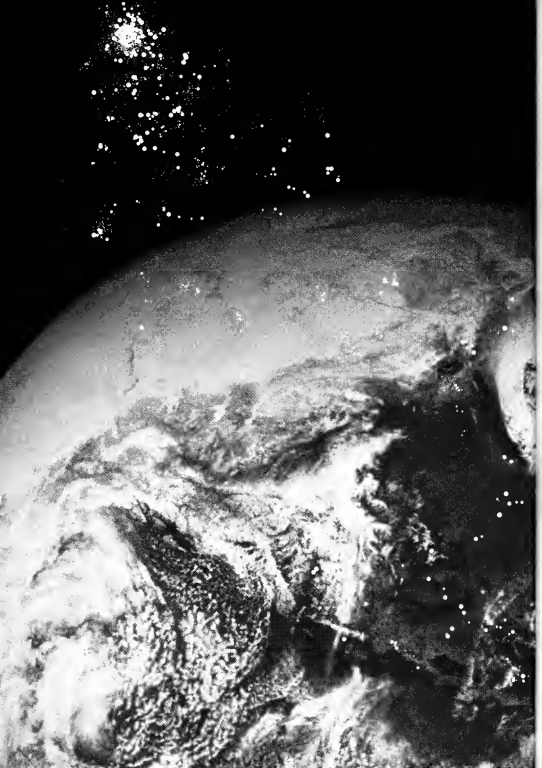

...
WHAT WAS THAT?


GWA!
WE COULDN'T REBUILD YOUR BODY.
WE'RE LEAVING BEHIND THIS AVIAN SUBSPECIES TO MAINTAIN YOUR CELLULAR STRUC-TURE.

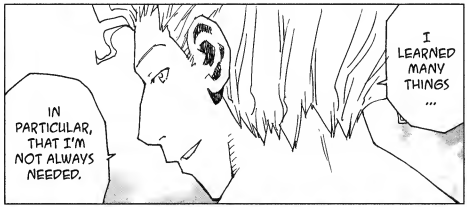
UH, SORRY.
I FORGOT TO TELL YOU.

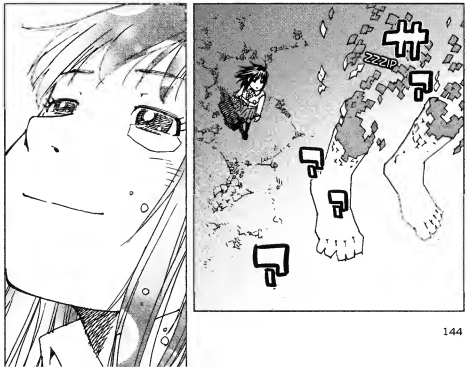
FLASH
WHAMP
ACK!
WHOOOOO
EVOLVING TO BE SLIGHTLY LESS LONELY ...
YEAH.
OKAY, WE'RE OFF.
BYE, HIKARU.
HEY, WE'RE READY!
BYE.
...

FLASH
WHAT A RESTLESS PAIR.
WELL, WELL.
ZHA
ZHA



I'LL BE GOING TOO.


I LEARNED MANY THINGS ...
IN PARTICULAR, THAT I'M NOT ALWAYS NEEDED.


ZZZIP

...
SHUT UP...

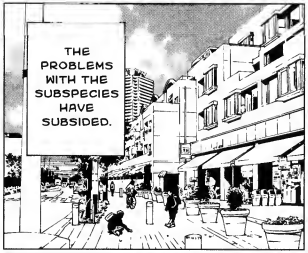
BRR
BRR

I SAID
IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

DON'T CALL ME "BIRDIE." I WANT A COOLER NAME.
I KNOW, BIRDIE.
HAVE WE EVOLVED TO BE JUST A LITTLE LESS LONELY? I DUNNO.
YOU'RE A BIRD. THUS, BIRDIE.

GOTTA MEET UP FOR KARA-OKE!
GWA!

HIKARU, HEY! HURRY UP!


THE PROBLEMS WITH THE SUBSPECIES HAVE SUBSIDED.

NGG, COLD!

HORIZON WAS RIGHT.

THE STARS ARE OUT ALREADY.

WHAT?
WHAT WAS THAT?
I WONDER IF WE'LL MEET AGAIN.

HA HA HA!
SPOT ON!

HIKARU!

HA HA HA!
AND THEN...

I WANNA SING WITH HIKARU!
WAIT FOR YOUR TURN!!

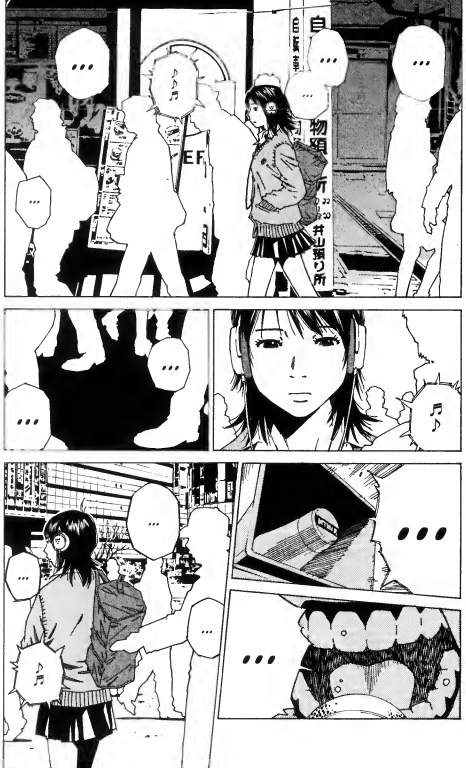
BLINK

7 BILLION NEEDLES

Fin

HIKIKOMORI ヒキコモリ ヘッドホンガール headphone girl

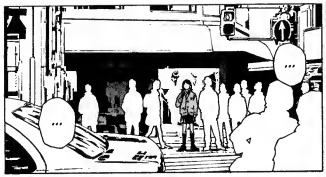
The following short was created before *7 Billion Needles* was serialized. It features a character who is Hikaru's prototype. "Hikikomori" means *shut-in*: someone who never leaves his or her room, for years in the worst cases.


自転車
物頃井山張り所

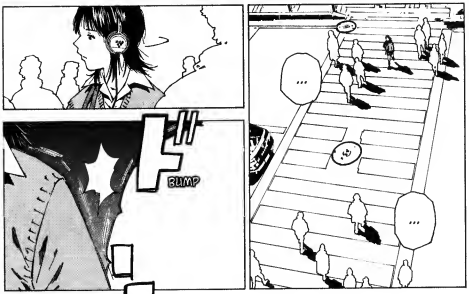
HIKIKOMORI
ヒキコモリ
headphone girl
ヘッドホンガール

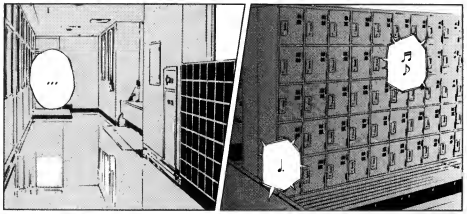
♪
...
...
...

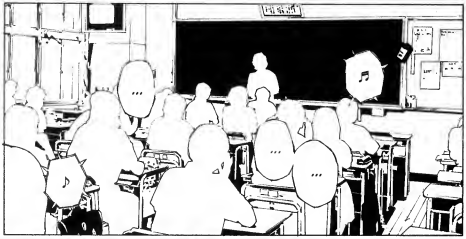
YOU'RE EVEN MORE "SHUT-IN" THAN THEY SAY.


...
...
...

BLINK


♪
BUMP
...
...

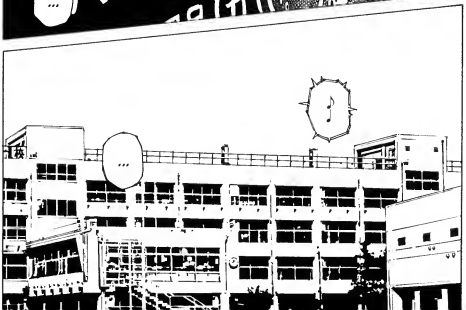

...
♪


...
♪
...
...

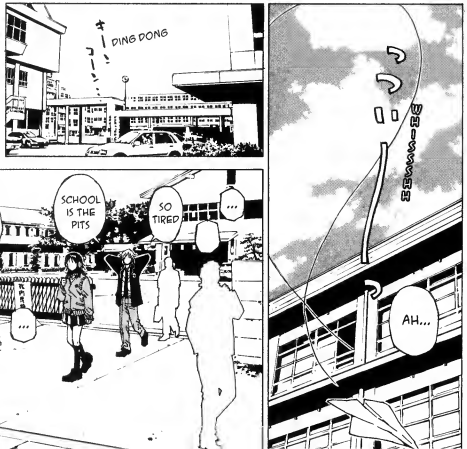
WHEN WILL IT END?
THIS CLASS SUCKS.
♪
♫

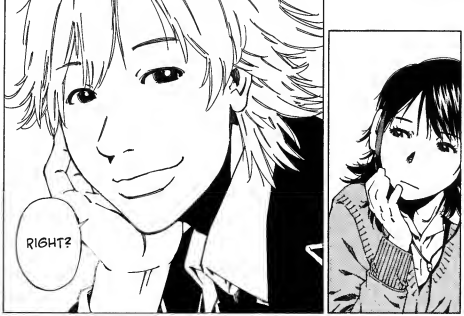
HASHIMOTO
♪

...

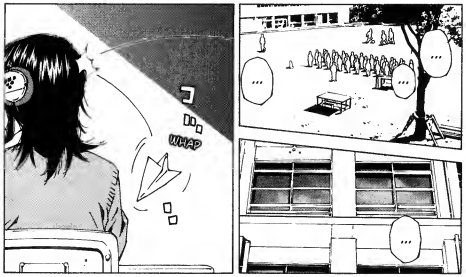

♪
...

GRIN
RUSTLE
I love you.
Marry me.


DING DONG
SCHOOL IS THE PITS
SO TIRED
...
...
...
SWEAT
AH...

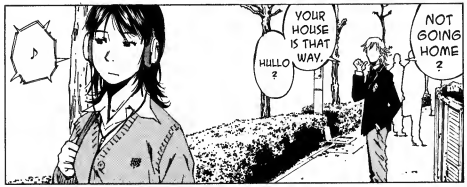

RIGHT?

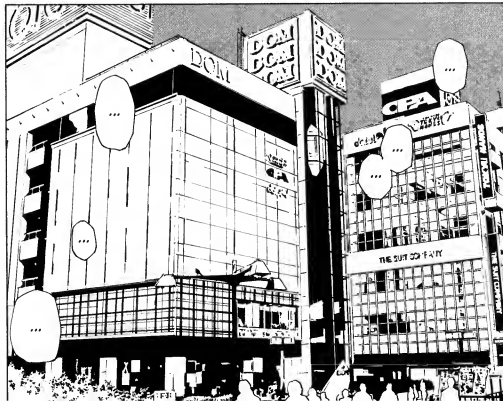
SURE, GO AHEAD, IGNORE ME.
HUH.
TURN


UNHP
...
...
...
...

...
...
...
ガラ…
RATTLE
CASHIER
CASH
...
...
A SKULL?
YOU LIKE THAT SORT OF THING?
GLANCE
チラ…

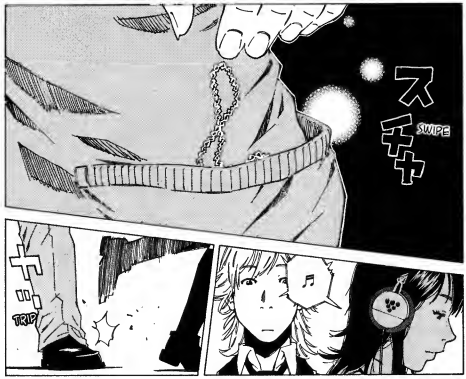
HUH?
NOT A WORD YET.
...
♪♪


♪
HULLO?
YOUR HOUSE IS THAT WAY.
NOT GOING HOME?


DOM
DOM
DOM
DOM
CPA
...
...
...
...
...
THE SUIT COMPANY

WHIRR
RUN AWAY!
DASH

THAT WAS CLOSE.
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT
YOU COULDN'T STAY A SHUT-IN IF THEY CAUGHT YOU.


スチャ
SWIPE
TRIP

カチャッ
KLATTER
SLAM

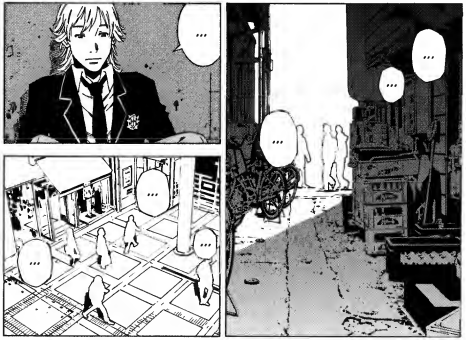
I...
REALLY DON'T KNOW IF I SHOULD SAY THIS.

BUT IT'S FOR YOUR BENEFIT,
SO I'LL SPIT IT OUT.

DUN
DUN
DUN
HM?
FREEZE
I CAN SEE YOUR UNDER-WEAR.

REALLY CLUMSY. BAD TIME TO TRIP.
GLENCH!

OH!
YOUR FIRST EXPRESSION!
THUMP
THUMP


...
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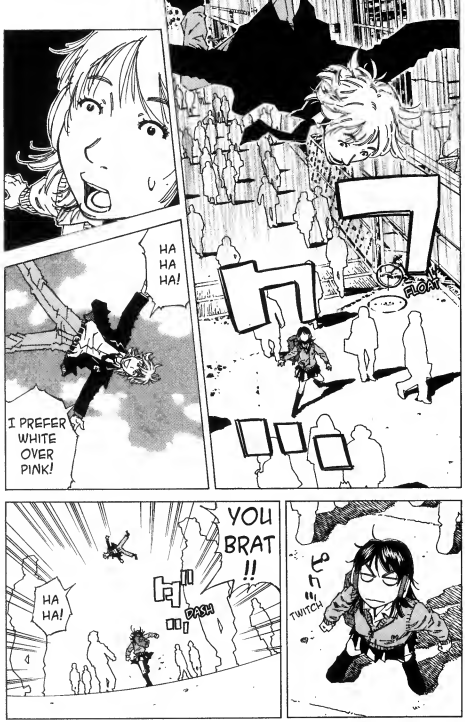
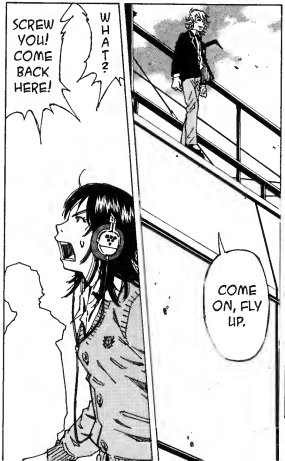

FLOAT
HA HA HA!
I PREFER WHITE OVER PINK!
YOU BRAT !!
HA HA!
DASH
TWITCH

2F
RUSH
Exciting
THUP
HEY!
STOP !!
DAM-MIT!!
GRAB
OOPS! FAST!
YOUR FIRST WORDS!
OH!

FROWN
YOU CAN FLY.
DAMN!
OR I'LL RUN.
HURRY!

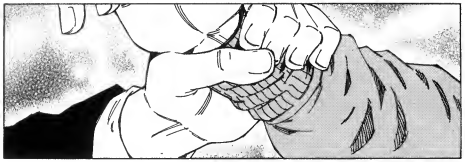
RAAA-AAR!
HUP

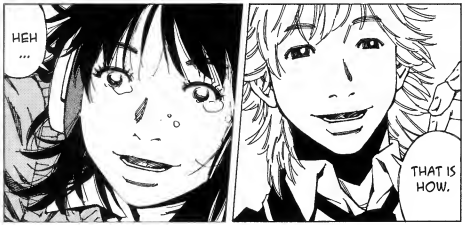
HERE! UP HERE!
ST.


SCREW YOU! COME BACK HERE!
WHAT?
COME ON, FLY UP.

WHERE ARE YOU?!

HERE.



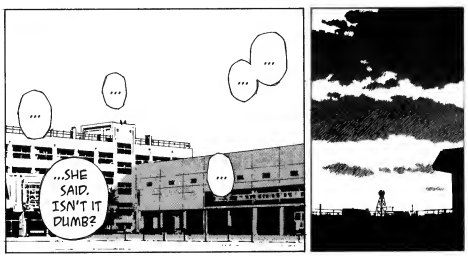

HEH ...
THAT IS HOW.

NNA ?!
WHOA !
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP
FLAP

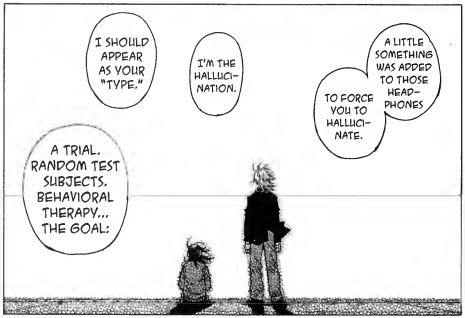
WHIRL

I DON'T REALLY GIVE A DAMN
BUT ...
'CAUSE ...
WE JUST DO THE SAME THING EVERY DAY, THERE'S NOTHING I WANNA DO, SO WHY LIVE?
THEY'RE ALL KIDS
GROWN-UPS ARE LIARS
THEY ALL BITCH ABOUT STUPID STUFF
DON'T THEY THINK ABOUT ANYTHING OTHER THAN BOYS?
I LOVED GRADE SCHOOL
ME, I WOULDN'T TELL EVEN IF THEY ASKED
MY MOM IS SO ANNOYING. A TOTAL NAG.
WHY STUDY?
IT'S NOT MY...
IT'S NOT MY FAULT.
TRY TALKING TO SOMEONE SO YOU'LL...
IT'S NOT LIKE THAT.
YOU KEPT ALL THAT INSIDE.

HA HA HA
HA HA HA HA!


...
...
...
...
...
...SHE SAID. ISN'T IT DUMB?

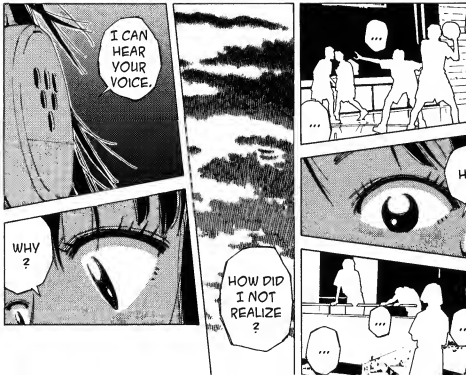
FINAL WHAT ?
F...
THE FINAL PHASE.
NOW, THEN.
RISE.

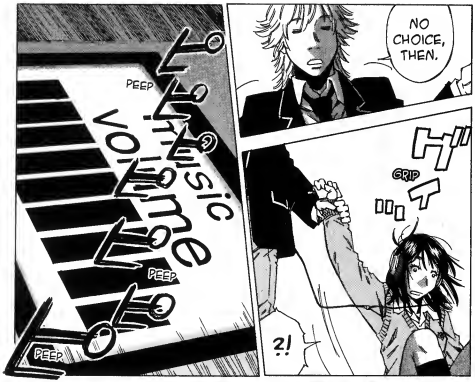

I SHOULD APPEAR AS YOUR "TYPE."
I'M THE HALLUCI-NATION.
A LITTLE SOMETHING WAS ADDED TO THOSE HEAD-PHONES
TO FORCE YOU TO HALLUCI-NATE.
A TRIAL. RANDOM TEST SUBJECTS. BEHAVIORAL THERAPY... THE GOAL:

ARE YOU PISSED ?
TO CURE KIDS LIKE YOU.

TAKE OFF THOSE HEAD-PHONES.

♪ ...
♫


I CAN HEAR YOUR VOICE.
WHY ?
HOW DID I NOT REALIZE ?
...
H...

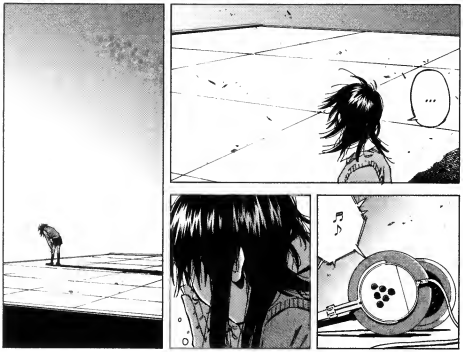

PEEP
PEEP
PEEP
music volume
NO CHOICE, THEN.
GRIP
?!

WURR
WURR
KLAK
WHIP
AGH!

I DON'T EVEN GET IT.
N-NO
YOU'RE FINE NOW.
WHAT HAPPENS IF I TAKE THEM OFF?
I WON'T DO IT.
WILL YOU DISAP-PEAR?
NO!
YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

LET'S GO.
WHERE TO?
OH, CRAP!
WHAT?!
THROW IT!
5 MORE LAPS!
COME ON!
YOUR WAY!
AH...

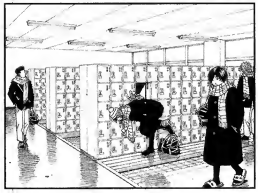
I'M HOME.
GO TAKE A BATH!
HURRY
TOO EARLY FOR BEER.
CURRY FOR DINNER!
MOM!
AGAIN?
GASP
WEIRD


...

HIKIKOMORI ヒキコモリ ヘッドホンガール
headphone girl

The End

Rough Designs



Early Images

HIKARU'S DAY